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AUTHOR	Dean, Marina L.; Hofeller, Margaret A.
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ABSTRACT

In order to increase student response at the New College of Hofstra University in the area of course evaluation, a one-page General Course Evaluation Questionnaire was designed for use in 1971-72. The questionnaire consists of five questions: (1) What are the three most important things you got out of this course? (2) What do you feel are the three most important things you should have gotten out of the course? (3) How would you describe the instructor? (4) What kinds of students would enjoy this course, or learn a lot from it? and (5) What suggestions do you have for improving this course? The response rate for 1971-72 was 58%. This paper presents results of the course evaluation questionnaire. (HS)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

New College Report #3*

August, 1972

Course Evaluation at New College 1971-72

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Marina L. Dean

Margaret A. Hofeller

*New College, Hofstra University's innovative degree-granting undergraduate unit, and the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Hofstra University, have joined in a cooperative program of educational research since 1961. Members of both staffs participate, with the College and the Center pooling resources for the divers projects. Participants in this cooperative venture into educational research include Dr. Harold E. Yuker, Director of the Center; David C. Christman, Dean of New College; Professor Margaret A. Hofeller, Project Director; Marina L. Dean, Research Associate; and Elaine Bosch, Research Assistant. The following report is a direct result of this jointly conducted research and is one of the continuing series of published documents.

HE 003 476

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New College has traditionally attended to student feedback as a significant and meaningful source of evaluative data for course revision and improvement. Prior to the 1971-72 academic year, a number of different forms had been designed and used for this purpose, including one highly detail 7-page course description form. Because of low student response rates and other problems with these early forms, a revised one-page General Course Evaluation Questionnaire (See Appendix A) was designed jointly by New College and the Center for the Study of Higher Education during the summer of 1971. The primary purpose of the new form was to provide the faculty and administration at the College with a general index of students' reactions to the courses offered in the context of their expectations. A supplementary one-page form (See Appendix B) was distributed to students attending the College Courses, offerings of an inter-disciplinary nature required of all freshmen and/or transfer students. This supplement, designed at the request of College Course instructors, was specific rather than general and asked students for their reactions to particular dimensions of the courses. The General Course Evaluation Questionnaire was distributed to students in attendance in all New College courses during the eighth week of each of the four sessions during the 1971-72 academic year. The College Course form was distributed to the appropriate students following Sessions II, III and IV of the academic year. (Interim reports, including tables detailing the anonymous course by course results of each administration were prepared and distributed to the New College faculty following each session). The purpose of the present report is to provide an over-all summary of the course evaluation program at New College for the 1971-72 academic year.

General Course Evaluation Questionnaire

Description

The one-page questionnaire, consisting of five questions, asked students: for their judgment of the three most important benefits they had derived from the course (Q. 1), as well as the three most important benefits they felt they should have derived (Q. 2); for their reactions to the course instructor (Q. 3); for their sense of the type of students who would enjoy the course (Q. 4); and for their suggestions for course improvement (Q. 5).

To assist the general research program, students were asked to identify themselves either by name or identification number on a separate, detachable sheet. Students were assured by a representative of the Educational Research office that after the results had been analyzed for each administration, the identification sheets would be removed and each faculty member would receive the completed, now anonymous forms for his own course(s), along with a copy of the interim summary report for the College. This was accomplished in each case. Reports were also distributed to officers of the Community Government.

Method of Administration

The following method of administration was employed to efficiently distribute the forms: several weeks before the end of each session, the Research Office contacted each instructor to arrange at his convenience, an appointment to deliver and distribute the forms during the last week of classes. This one-week period was selected to permit an essentially comparable, but non-intrusive, administration schedule. Hence, during the last week of each session, the forms were delivered at the pre-arranged time to each New College class and distributed to all attending students. Student volunteers then collected the completed forms and returned them to the Research Office.

Results

A comparison of the average percentages of responses given to Questions 1, 2 and 3, by course academic areas, during the four administrations of the questionnaire, is presented in Table 1. The responses only to the first three questions were analyzed, since the replies to Question 4 and 5 were specifically for instructor use.

Responses to Questions 1 and 3 were analyzed and grouped into the following categories: Positive; Negative; Mixed; and "No Answer" or "Not Appropriate." Replies to Question 2 were coded as: "Same" - responses in which students indicated what they should have gained was the same as what they felt they actually did gain (essentially a positive response); "More" - responses in which students reported they should have derived more than they actually did (essentially a mixed response); or "Different" - responses in which students stated that what they should have achieved was different from what they actually did (essentially a negative response). As with Question 1 and 3, there was also a "No Answer" or "Not Appropriate" category. This last classification also included replies which were too esoteric or too ambiguous to code. As mentioned above, all data are given in terms of average percentage of responses across all courses within each particular academic area. It should be noted that since the number of students enrolled in the different courses varied greatly, these percentages represent widely different N's.

Response Rates. The average percentage of respondents during each session is given in the column following "Course and session." There were 360 students at the College during 1971-72, each taking an average of six to eight courses a year. A total of 372 (62%) forms were obtained from the 600 registrations

Table 1
Comparison between Sessions I, II, III and IV - Academic Year 1971-72 New College
Average Percentage of Responses to Questions 1, 2, 3 of General Course Evaluation Questionnaire

Course and Respondents' Session	Average Percentage of Students Responding	Q. 1-What students "got out of each course"				Q. 2-What students "should have gotten out of course				Q. 3-Reaction to instructor			
		Average % of Responses				Average % of Responses				Average % of Responses			
		Positive	Negative	Mixed	N.A.	Same	More	Different	N.A.	Positive	Negative	Mixed	N.A.
College Courses													
Session I N=159	59%	84	2	10	4	27	42	19	12	45	13	33	9
Session II N=123	65%	78	8	11	3	26	26	19	29	33	14	47	6
SessionIII N= 87	66%	63	10	18	9	23	40	9	28	54	12	25	9
Session IV N=139	37%	75	15	4	6	29	34	8	29	56	7	33	4
Total N = 508	56%	76	8	11	5	26	36	15	23	45	12	35	8
Humanities													
Session I N=194	62%	90	1	4	5	46	27	3	24	79	3	14	4
Session II N=255	49%	96	2	2	0	50	24	3	23	67	2	25	6
SessionIII N=157	64%	97	0	1	3	53	27	0	20	69	2	21	8
Session IV N=206	41%	94	0	1	5	70	11	1	18	83.3	2.4	6	8.3
Total N = 812	53%	94	1	2	3	54	23	2	21	74	2	17	7
Social Sciences													
Session I N=225	66%	92	3	2	3	43	28	11	18	63	11	24	2
Session II N=233	62%	92	2	3	3	58	17	6	19	67	3	26	4
SessionIII N=210	62%	95	1.5	1.5	2	56	22	3	19	75	0	20	5
Session IV N=212	61%	95	0	1	4	61	18	0	21	79	3	17	1
Total N = 880	63%	93	2	2	3	54	22	5	19	71	4	22	3

Table 1 (Continued)

Course and Respondents' Session	Average Percentage of Students Responding	Q. 1-What students "got out of each course"				Q. 2-What students "should have gotten out of course"				Q. 3 Reaction to instructor			
		Average % of Responses				Average % of Responses				Average % of Responses			
		Positive	Negative	Mixed	N.A.	Same	More	Different	N.A.	Positive	Negative	Mixed	N.A.
Natural Sciences													
Session I N=22	45%	90	0	0	10	60	30	0	10	80	10	10	0
Session II N= 8	63%	100	0	0	0	60	40	0	0	60	0	20	20
Session III N=26	89%	91	0	0	9	57	17	0	26	91.3	0	4.3	4,3
Session IV N=56	75%	86	0	2	12	55	17	2	26	81	5	12	2
Total N = 112	71%	89	0	1	10	56	20	1	23	82	4	10	4
Totals													
Session I N=600	62%	89	2	5	4	40	31	11	18	64	9	22	5
Session II N=619	57%	90	3	4	3	48	22	8	22	59	5	31	5
Session III N=480	65%	89	3	4	4	49	27	3	21	71	3	20	6
Session IV N=613	50%	90	3	1	6	57	19	2	22	76	4	16	4
Yearly Total 2312	58%	89	3	4	4	48	25	6	21	67	5	23	5

during Session I, excluding Independent Study projects; 355 (57%) from the 518 enrollees in Session II; 310 (65%) from the 480 during Session III; and 307 (50%) from the 613 enrollees in Session IV. Thus, a grand total of 1345 (58%) forms were obtained from the 2312 course enrollments during the 1971-72 academic year. The somewhat low over-all response rate for Session IV seems to be due to the lower response rates in the College Courses and Humanities areas, since response rates in the Social Sciences remained about the same, and increased over the two previous sessions in the Natural Sciences area.

In order to investigate the relationship between students' commitment toward their education and their responsiveness to the course evaluation program, a profile was constructed of the academic standing of students who did not respond to the course evaluations during the first two sessions (Fall Semester) of 1971-72. Of the 360 students, 282 (80%) responded to at least one course evaluation. (Most students took four courses.) However, many advanced students are enrolled in independent study projects, readings courses, and apprenticeship projects and therefore were not eligible to receive the General Course Evaluation Questionnaire. Thus, it is not surprising that the highest percentage of non-respondents were advanced students: 11% of the first year class; 19% of the second; 35% of the third; and 43% of the fourth. By the end of 1971-72, 21% of those who had not responded to any evaluation forms in courses in which they were enrolled during the first two sessions withdrew from the College. Another 5% were dropped for reasons of insufficient academic progress.

An over-all proportion of 62% of the 78 non-respondents were in good academic standing at the end of the year; 12% were in academic jeopardy; 21% withdrew; and 5% were later dropped by the College for poor scholarship. In

contrast, those students who responded to at least one evaluation form were distributed as follows. 82% were in good standing; 7% in jeopardy; 11% withdrew and none were dropped. Thus, whether due to differences in attendance patterns or in more complex forms of commitment, those students who participated in the evaluation program during Sessions I and II demonstrated observably better academic accomplishment than did their peers.

Response Content. Certain trends in the responses to Questions 1, 2 and 3 may be perceived across all areas. Compared to the other two questions, the highest proportion of 'Positive' responses was to the question (#1) on what students gained from each course (76% College Courses; 94% Humanities; 95% Social Science; 89% Natural Science). The lowest percentage of "Positive" (i.e. Same") replies (26% College Courses; 54% Humanities and Social Science; 56% Natural Science) - with a concomitantly high rate of 'No Answer" responses - was made to the item (#2) asking for the student's own goals for the course. Question 3, focusing on the course instructor, elicited moderate percentages of "Positive" replies (45% College Courses; 74% Humanities; 71% Social Science; 82% Natural Science), and at the same time, greater percentages of "Mixed" responses.

These data indicate that most students at New College who responded to the course evaluation forms during the 1971-72 academic year report their academic gains in positive terms, with many of them indicating that what they should have gained was the same as what they actually did gain. It should also be noted that while the average percentage of students who indicated they should have derived something 'More' was often considerable (a range 20%-34%), the average percentage of "Different" replies was relatively small, with the exception of the College Courses, whose average 'Different" response rate was

15%. The average "Different" response rate to the Humanities was only 5%; to Social Sciences 2% and to Natural Sciences 1%. Thus it would appear that New College students were relatively satisfied with the content of the courses per se, especially the advanced ones, but at the same time, felt they should be learning more. Question 2 elicited the least percentage of responses compared to the other two questions, that is, it consistently received the highest rate of 'No Answer' replies. This may be due to a misperception of this question as redundant to the first one. In evaluating instructors (Question 3), the majority of respondents gave "Positive" replies, although, it should be noted, a good number expressed "Mixed" feelings, indicating both positive and negative qualities.

It is interesting to note that a rank order correlation of the average percentage of 'positive" response standings to questions 1 and 3, course and instructor evaluations respectively, for the College, Humanities, Social Science, and Natural Science courses in each of the sessions yields a low degree of relationship (rho = .32). Apparently, students did discriminate between these two dimensions. However, a similar correlation between ranking on instructor ratings (Question 3) and congruence between course expectation and reality (Question 2) yields a much higher relationship (rho = .71). Students' reaction to their instructors appears, then, to be more closely related to the degree to which they report their expectations for the course have been met than to their evaluation of their gains from the courses. More detailed inquiry into the importance of expectation ought to be made focusing on the quality and intensity of such expectations as they interact with other dimensions of classroom behavior.

The proportion of responses to the three major questions are compared

to academic standing in Table 2. The most interesting result is the markedly

Table 2

Percentage of responses to specific questions on course evaluation forms during Sessions I and II, 1971-72.

Academic Standing	Proportion of course evaluation forms completed: Equal to or More than Half	Less than Half
Question #1		
Good Standing (N=23.2)	94	6
Jeopardy (N=20)	95	5
Withdrew (N=30)	87	13
Question #2		
Good Standing	48	52
Jeopardy	65	35
Withdrew	60	40
Question #3		
Good Standing	75	25
Jeopardy	85	15
Withdrew	77	23

lower response rate of students in good standing to Question 2, 'What are the three most important things you should have gotten out of this course. Over-all, the number of replies to this question is lower than to the other two. Nonetheless, it seems clear that students experiencing some academic

difficulty are more likely than their peers to respond to this question. As noted above, this question was the least often answered of the three, and of the responses, it received the fewest positive evaluations. A content analysis of this item would be most enlightening and should be accomplished in the future. Of equal interest would be more information about the direction of responses of the 85% of those in academic jeopardy to Question 3, which inquired about reactions to the course instructor.

In summary, it may be concluded from these data that the General Course Evaluation Questionnaire, administered at New College during the 1971-72 academic year revealed that the majority of New College students who responded to the forms expressed essentially positive feelings about the courses and instructors. The freshman-level College Courses were the least well received. In addition to the summary data presented here, records are kept of individual course evaluation so that comparisons may be made across different years of presentation.

Description

The one-page College Course Evaluation Form consisted of ten questions, each pertaining to a specific aspect of the course, for example, "quality of class discussion." Students were asked to rate the various categories according to a six-point scale, ranging from "Very Good" to "Not Applicable." The form also asked students for comments and suggestions.

Method of Administration

The College Course Evaluation Form was administered to those students in attendance at the College Courses during the last week of classes of Sessions II, III and IV of the 1971-72 academic year. The form was stapled to the General Course Evaluation Questionnaire, and College Course students

were reminded at the time of the administration to complete the extra form.

Results

A comparison of the average percentage of responses to the College Course Evaluation Form administered following Sessions II, III and IV is presented in Table 3. The data were analyzed in terms of percentages of responses to each of the ten categories: 1) Meaningfulness of major focus of the course; 2) quality of class discussion; 3) intellectual value of class presentations; 4) intellectual value of assigned readings; 5) quality of interactions among faculty participants; 6) amount of work required; 7) quality of writing assignments; 8) extent of learning about skillful writing; 9) extent of learning about the field of inquiry; and 10) extent of student's own involvement in the course. For the purposes of simplifying the data, responses on the six-point rating scale were classified into four groups: 1) Positive ("Good" and "Very Good" replies); 2) "Average" responses; 3) Negative ("Poor" and "Very Poor" responses) and 4) "Not Applicable" or "No Answer" replies.

Response Rates. Following Session II, 78 (65%) of the 123 students enrolled in four College Courses completed the form; 55 (64%) forms were obtained from the 87 enrollees in the three College Courses during Session III; and 52 (37%) out of the 139 enrolled during Session IV returned the completed forms. Although Sessions II and III elicited similarly high response rates, the rate declined noticeably in Session IV. This was primarily due to the fact that one of the three College Courses offered during Session IV, the 12 week senior course "Values in Crisis," was scheduled to conclude class meetings several weeks prior to the evaluation week, and students had to be contacted by mail to complete the evaluation forms. This resulted in a response rate of only

Table 3

Comparison of Average Percentage of
Responses to College Course
Evaluation Form
Sessions II, III and IV
1971-72

Session and Question	Average Percent of Responses			
	Positive (Good & Very Good)	Average	Negative (Poor & Very Poor)	Not Applicable or No Answer
Question 1 - Meaningfulness of the major focus of the course				
Session II N=78	61	24	9	5
IIIN=55	50	16	21.5	12.5
IV N=52	54	21	15	10
Combined Average	56	21	15	8
Question 2 - Quality of class discussion				
Session II	31	24	42	3
III	30.5	31	31	7
IV	29	42	27	0
Combined Average	30	31	35	4
Question 3 - Intellectual value of class presentations				
Session II	53	29	14	4
III	41.5	35	7	16.5
IV	50	33	7	10
Combined Average	48	32	11	9
Question 4 - Intellectual value of assigned readings				
Session II	55	27	18	0
III	32	18	29	21
IV	61	27	10	2
Combined Average	51	24	19	6

Table 3 (Continued)

Session and Question	Average Percent of Responses			
	Positive (Good & Very Good)	Average	Negative (Poor & Very Poor)	Not Applicable or No Answer
Question 5 - Quality of interaction among faculty participants				
Session II	25	18	9	47
III	45	29	13	13
IV	29	4	6	61
Combined Average	32	17	10	41
Question 6 - Amount of work required				
Session II	32	45	14	9
III	35	33	16	16
IV	48	37	9	6
Combined Average	37	39	14	10
Question 7 - Quality of writing assignments				
Session II	39	36	19	5
III	33	16	33	18
IV	56	23	13	8
Combined Average	42	27	22	9
Question 8 - Extent of learning about skillful writing				
Session II	18	26	24	32
III	16	16	33	34
IV	10	31	17	42
Combined Average	15	24	25	36
Combined 9 - Extent of learning about the field of inquiry				
Session II	48	32	16	4
III	40	33	25	2
IV	53	27	12	8
Combined Average	47	31	17	5

Table 3 (Continued)

Session and Question	Average Percent of Responses: Positive (Good & Very Good)	Average	Negative (Poor & Very Poor)	Not Applicable or No Answer
Question 10 - Extent of student's own involvement in the course				
Session II	59	28	10	3
III	46	29	22	3
IV	44.5	34.5	21	0
Combined Average	51	30	16.5	2.5

16% for this single course, thus decreasing the over-all average for the Session. It should be noted that these response rates, except for the fourth session, are not unlike those for the General Course Evaluation Questionniare (p. 3).

Content Response. Inspection of the combined responses to each of the ten questions indicates that a dominant percentage of positive responses was given to six out of the ten questions (Q. 1,3,4,7,9, and 10). To only one question (Q. 2 - "Quality of class discussion") was there a preponderance of negative replies. Question 6 ("Amount of work required") elicited the highest percentage of "Average" responses, and there was a majority of "Not Applicable" or "No Answer" replies to two questions: (Q. 5 - "Quality of interaction among faculty participants" and Q. 8 - "Extent of learning about skillful writing.") This may obtain because these particular questions were not directly relevant to certain courses.

As was the case with the General Course Evaluation Questionnaire, most students who completed the form expressed at least minimal satisfaction with the College Courses offered at New College during the 1971-72 academic year.

Summary and Conclusions

The relatively high student response rates to both the New College General Evaluation Questionnaire and the College Course Evaluation Form during the four administrations during 1971-72 suggests that student concern and interest in New College's evaluation program remained high throughout the year. In addition, the cooperation on the part of the New College faculty, essential to any evaluational program, was excellent. The interest of all New College constituencies in the evaluation program during its first full year is cause for optimism. However, certain questions arise and must be examined.

A number of the New College faculty expressed marked dissatisfaction with the form on the grounds that it failed to elicit the specific feedback they desired about the distinguishing features of each of their courses. The obvious corrective measure would be to encourage the faculty to supplement the collegiate form with questions directly aimed at innovative and/or essential dimensions unique to each course. From a collegiate standpoint, abandonment of the college-wide form in favor of individualized ones is not recommended since it would preclude any potentially fruitful comparisons over different years and/or programs.

Another difficulty with the present form is the coding of often complicated responses into summary categories such as Positive, Negative or Mixed. As was pointed out by a number of faculty, the coding sometimes misinterpreted, i.e. failed to correctly apprehend subtle innuendos of content or style of reply. Greater effort can be made to avoid coding errors, but such problems in interpretation are known to be characteristic of open-ended questions. The advantages of this form of question in terms of the

fuller information it tends to elicit would seem to outweight the potential for occasional errors in coding. Furthermore, the return of the original forms to the faculty serves to allow them to re-analyze the results from their more complete perspective.

The use of a three-point rating scale of the responses may be somewhat limiting, if not misleading. "Positive" responses could theoretically include an array from "Excellent" or "Outstanding" to "Average." "Negative" replies are similarly all inclusive rather than differentiated. A five or six-point scale, rated directly by the students, to provide a finer discrimination of the quality of teachers and courses, may offer a possible solution. However, in order to preserve some of the benefits of an open-ended form, in terms of specific and constructive suggestions to the instructors by the students, a form which would combine both types of evaluation is recommended. In this manner, an increase in accuracy and discrimination might be achieved, and at the same time, the advantages of individual comments could still be retained.

Student receptivity to the form is apparently quite strong, as evidenced by the response rates over the year. On the average, students are asked to complete eight forms each year. As noted earlier, students who are in good standing are more likely than others to complete the forms. It seems clear that if the College indeed wants more complete feedback from its students, greater attention should be devoted to gaining the participation of those who are not faring well academically. In turn, faculty need to assess their individual evaluations in the context of these data on differential responses rates of students at various level of academic accomplishment.

In summary, the evaluation program at New College during the 1971-72

academic year was successful in its generation of student and faculty co-operation and interest. Whereas the relatively favorable results obtained require careful evaluation, as discussed above, it would seem that a strong foundation for a meaningful evaluation program has been initiated. It is hoped that as revision and modifications in the forms and in the method of feedback are achieved, and with the continuing support and cooperation of the faculty and students, this program will become more instructive for all members of the New College academic community, and will serve as a constructive guide for curricular revision and improvement.

FORM A

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Rev

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION
and
NEW COLLEGE, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Course Description (Short Form)

Department & Course # _____ Title _____

Instructor _____ Session & Year _____

Your Concentrat. Area _____ Academic Yr. _____ Required course? Yes___
No___

Suppose a friend were to ask you each of the following questions about this course; how would you answer him? All answers will be anonymous.

1. What are the three most important things you got out of this course?

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

2. What do you feel are the three most important things you <u>should</u> have gotten out of the course?

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

3. How would you describe the instructor? _____

   _____

   _____

4. What kinds of students would enjoy this course, or learn a lot from it?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. What suggestions do you have for improving this course? _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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APPENDIX B

SUPPLEMENTARY COURSE EVALUATION FOR NEW COLLEGE "COLLEGE COURSES"

COURSE # _____ TITLE _____

INSTRUCTOR _____ SESSION AND YEAR _____

YOUR CONCENTRATION AREA _____ YOUR ACADEMIC YEAR _____

Please rate each of the dimensions of this College Course as listed below, according to the following code:

A = Very Good
B = Good
C = Average
D = Poor
E = Very Poor
X = Not Applicable

1._____Meaningfulness of the major focus of the course.

2._____Quality of class discussion.

3._____Intellectual value of the class presentations.

4._____Intellectual value of the assigned readings.

5._____Quality of interaction among the faculty participants.

6._____Amount of work required.

7._____Quality of writing assignments.

8._____Extent of learning about skillful writing.

9._____Extent of learning about the field of inquiry.

10._____Extent of your own involvement in the course, in terms of time and effort expended, etc.

It would be most helpful if you would elaborate upon your ratings, that is, more fully express the reasons for your evaluations of this College Course, and/or offer suggestions for its improvement. Use back of sheet, if necessary.

_____

_____

_____